Infant Massage

by Angela Sinclair

Introduction to Baby Massage

Infant massage seems to be sweeping the world at the moment - it's popularity has exploded within the last few years, much of which is due to Vimala McClure and the IAIM. But, as with most natural healing techniques, it is by no means a new thing. People have been massaging babies for centuries. Once again, it is the Western World that is slow on the uptake. But we are learning, and more and more people are being trained to be able to teach this art to the people who need to know. Who needs to know? Well, the obvious ones are mothers, but also in this bracket are fathers, grandparents and guardians. Equally important are the people who care for children outside the home, nurses on Intensive Care Units that work with premature babies for instance, and those who work with the disabled. There are many benefits from massage for all babies, and these two groups in particular.

Infant massage obviously benefits the infant, this is one of the main reasons for giving massage. Caring touch is good for everyone, and infants especially who are new to the world need the reassurance of someone special being there for them. But have you considered that the massage can be beneficial to the giver too? There are some major benefits for the massage giver, including increased awareness of the baby and their needs and it can also aid the bonding process between care giver and baby.

In this Western Society, healing arts are not automatically accepted, despite being practiced for thousands of years. Although relevant research has been undertaken over many years, there is a huge upsurge in the amount of scientific research being done to prove or disprove the benefits of massage, touch and infant massage. It is a sad reflection on the society that, although many people can testify to something's worth, and the benefits that it brings to them and those around them, it will not be trusted until it can be proven scientifically. On the positive side though, it means that there is more and more information available for those people interested in massage and it's benefits:

The Benefits of Infant Massage

Although it can seem like there is not much going on in a baby's world, it is a new and exciting time for them. It may seem like they do little but eat, sleep and demand attention - with a regular diaper change thrown in for good measure - but they are learning more now than they will ever learn again in such a short period of time. Little wonder that it can take time to adjust, from being thrust rudely from a state of tranquillity, warmth and comfort into a world of changing faces, cold winds, warm baths and, well, everything else that we see every day and take for granted.

I am not trying to suggest that massaging your baby will ensure that they will be a happy and easy child. But it may be able to ease some of the problems that you could encounter along the way.

The benefits of Infant Massage can be grouped into the following main categories:
- Relaxation
- Relief
- Stimulation
- Interaction

You may think that RELAXATION should not be necessary for a baby - after all, what worries do they have? But there is much going on in a new baby's life, they have more to adjust to than they will ever have again. Stress is normal, in everyone's life, baby's included. It is what ensures we get up in the morning. It has been found that all-humans, from babyhood to old age, survive best on a period of high stress followed by a period of deep relaxation. However, we as a race have forgotten how to relax - there is always something that needs to be done, or a deadline to meet, or a call to make. Babies can pick up on this, and because we do not know how to relax, they do not learn to relax.

Massage can help ease the muscles into relaxation, and when practiced on a regular basis, teaches the infant what relaxation is and how to go about it. And as a side-benefit, the massager gets to take time out to gently massage their baby and they usually de-stress at the same time!

RELIEF from pain. Colic can be a nightmare. There are massage techniques that can ease the pain and discomfort of spasm or gas. They can help to disperse gas, ease muscle spasm, tone the digestive system and help it to work efficiently. It is not a miracle cure, and can take a few days to ease, but in my experience it can be more effective than a pharmaceutical remedy. Of course there can be other considerations - for example, the mother's diet can be a factor if baby is breastfed, therefore it is wise to examine the possible causes in addition to giving a regular massage. Besides helping to relieve colic, there are also massage techniques that can help teething and emotional stress.

It may seem that STIMULATION is incompatible with relaxation, but massage can do both, all depending on the mood, setting and what your aims are. In general terms, most people would be looking for relaxation when going for a massage, and would want the same for their Infant. But there are times and situations when relaxation would not be beneficial, such as massaging a baby with cerebral palsy. Therefore you have to be careful to judge each baby's needs individually and that is especially so for babies with this condition. Some areas of muscle may be tense and need relaxing and some areas loose and need to be stimulated. However infant massage does not just stimulate muscles, it can stimulate other systems of the body as well. For example, it can help aid digestion and so ease the symptoms of constipation. It also stimulates blood flow - when you massage someone you will feel the area you are working on become warmer. Some babies have poor circulation and have cold hands and feet - if this is the case for your baby, massaging for just 5 minutes will make a difference that you can notice. Probably the most startling statistic of Infant massage research so far is that massage can help increase weight gain in premature infants by as much as 47%.

INTERACTION (also classed as bonding) is a very complex process, and many factors can affect it. It is the development of understanding of each other, of knowledge.
about who the other is and what they need. Each parent and baby bond is very unique, and there is no one way that it happens, no one method that guarantees an easy path.

The ideal scenario is that mother (and father) and baby instantly bond as soon as they set eyes on each other just after birth. But that is by no means the norm. There are a few situations where bonding may be delayed. Some people who have a good delivery and hold the baby straight away may not like the way their baby looks - they may be wrinkly and red, or have a misshapen head. They do not want to believe that this is the baby that they made - it can't be, it is not beautiful enough. In other instances, the mother is too weak after a bad labor to want to know the baby. And there are some cases in which the baby is taken away from the parent straight after birth because of medical reasons, such as the baby may be very premature or it may not be breathing well. In other situations, the mother may feel guilty about passing on HIV to the child, or taking drugs or smoking while pregnant.

But bonding isn't an instantaneous reaction to having given birth. It is an ongoing process and, as such, it can be started at any time. In fact, it will already have started in pregnancy, with the mother feeling the baby's kicks and the baby hearing it's mother's voice. It is difficult for parents who feel they should have bonded with their baby and instead have feelings of guilt or of emptiness because it hasn't happened the way they feel it should. But they should take heart from the fact that interaction can take place later, and usually does. If the parent hasn't had the opportunity to be with the baby straight after birth then it may take longer. But it will happen. It is not a case of 'love at first sight', but instead of working at it from day one, and continuing to work at it as your baby grows and changes. There is always something new to learn about a child as they grow, they develop and change. Because of that, the bond between parent and child is always growing and changing.

Infant massage encourages a good relationship between mother and baby. It gives them a place and a time to be together, free from the worries and pressures of everyday life. It gives them space to just be together, not changing nappies or making dinner, shopping or sterilizing bottles. Infant massage instructors teach infant massage - once the mother is confident to massage without thinking about what move comes next or if they are doing the stroke correctly - then comes a time of real communication between mother and baby. Watching and learning from each other, and getting to know who the other person is.

**Conditions for Massage**

This is a guide for the best circumstances in which to massage your baby - remember though, you know baby best, and none of this is set in stone!

**Time** - it is good to get baby into a routine where he/she knows when the massage will happen, whether it be first thing in the morning, after a bath, just before bedtime - the choice is yours. Remember - you don't have to do everything every time, if time is short, just do the bits baby likes best!

**Temperature** - make sure the room you are massaging in is warm - babies are not good at regulating their body temperature (especially premature infants). Remember, you will be removing their clothes so keep the room temperature set at a comfortable level.
Light - it is best not to have the room too bright - and be especially careful not to have either electric light or sunlight shining in your baby's face as it will be uncomfortable for him or her.

Oil - It has been shown that babies prefer massage with oil - so which to use? I and most (if not all) massage therapists recommend a vegetable or plant oil, i.e. not traditional baby oil, which is mineral based. Plant based oils are easy to absorb into the skin, and easily digested if your baby sucks his thumb with oil attached! Mineral oils are not readily absorbed and, if not harmful are certainly not good for you. So which oil? The two most common are grapeseed oil and sweet almond oil. I personally use grapeseed, I like the way it feels. Why not try them both and see what suits you best?

Nappy or no nappy? - or diaper for those non-Brits out there! I would go for no nappy, if at all possible. If you are worried about leaks and messes then you can use plenty of towels to lay baby on. But think - if you were a baby being massaged, wouldn't you prefer to be able to kick your legs freely and get fresh air ..... well ..... you know where :)

Dad - you can massage baby too!

Dads don't always have it easy. It may seem that theirs is the easy option, especially to new mums with difficult babies, and yes there is certainly an element of truth in that. But after the months of anticipation of this delightful new arrival in the family, who is going to ensure a loving and cohesive family unit, the reality may not be quite as hoped.

Dads can easily feel shut out of their new baby's life, especially if mum is breastfeeding baby. It may seem that there is no place for dad in their child's life, especially in the earlier weeks and months when there really isn't an awful lot of playing and laughing going on. This was exactly my experience with my second child (now 14 months old). Ewan was a truly delightful baby, he slept well, he ate well, he (unlike my first) did not suffer colic or wind. The dream baby, so I thought! But it didn't take long for his dad to feel left out. Ewan really didn't need much done, I was feeding him myself and so Mike didn't have a place in his life, or so it seemed to him, while I was totally content and bonded with the new person in my life.

Of course it isn't the case that there is no place for dad. Massage is one of several ways to get him involved. And he has the knowledge that he is doing something that will truly benefit the baby. There are other things as well - bathing the baby for example, or if baby is bottle fed he can take his turn with that. But when a dad is interested in doing the massage let him! It is a wonderful sight to see.

In one class that I took, both mum and dad came along to learn infant massage. The baby had been very premature (born at 24 weeks) and had been in an incubator for 2 months. In the initial period after having the baby, neither parent was in a position to bond physically with their child. I knew from the mum that dad had found it particularly difficult to bond after all the problems and setbacks and tests and trauma that they and baby had been through. She was concerned that he still wasn't confident with her, although she was now 6 months old.
One of the major benefits of infant massage is learning to communicate together. Eye contact is encouraged throughout the sessions, as is chatting or singing to baby. After the first 2 sessions there was already an improvement in the lines of communication between them. You could see the light in dad’s eyes as he got to know his baby, and understand who she was. And you could see the difference in the way baby was with him too. Rather than being with dad just to be passed to mum again, they started to enjoy each other’s company. I am not saying that infant massage will cure all problems. But it is right for some people. You will know if it is right for you.

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1. Quiet Sleep  
   Smooth breathing rhythm  
   Closed eyelids with no movement  
   Muscle tone flaccid  

2. Active Sleep  
   Alternates between rapid and slow breathing  
   May twitch and cry  
   REM (rapid eye movement) during sleep  

3. Drowsy  
   State between sleep and wake  
   More body movement  
   Eyes open  

4. Quiet Alert  
   Bodies inactive  
   Eyes open  
   Eye contact  
   Cooing sounds  

   If no medication is given during the birth procedure, the quiet alert stage lasts approximately one hour after delivery. This is the best time for the parents to bond with their baby. If the child has special needs, this opportunity is often lost. Massage helps parents bond with their baby at a later time.  

5. Active Alert  
   Can become over stimulated  
   Rhythmic cycles  
   Gaze aversion when tired  

6. Fussy, Crying  
   Crying noises  
   Vigorous movements  
   Skin may flush  
   Other gross activities  

   The best time of day to massage an infant is in the Quiet Alert Stage. This is when the newborn is generally willing and ready for some type of activity.
When, Where, and How Long to Massage Your Baby

The practicalities of when and where to massage your baby are flexible. Choose a time and location that are comfortable for both of you.

When to Massage
Infant massage is baby-focused and baby-led time, so when and how long you massage your baby is up to you and your baby. Everyone has different schedules, and with a new baby, life is different each day. Find a time when you aren’t rushed and when your baby is calm, quiet, and alert. Trust that together you’ll find the right time, and keep in mind that as your baby grows; the time of day will change according to:

- Changes in daily routines
- Sleep-wake rhythms
- General mood
- Your baby’s changing likes and dislikes

The Quiet-Alert State
The ideal time to massage your baby is when she’s in the mood that’s called the quiet-alert state. This means she is ready to engage, learn, and respond. In this state:

- Your baby’s eyes are bright
- Your baby's body language is open and relaxed
- Your baby is responsive to your gaze, voice, and touch

Babies transition from mood to mood, and infant massage helps them transition easier—making it easier for you too.

How to Know Whether It’s a Good Time
Your baby will let you know whether it’s a good time to massage. Look to him for the cues and signals that say “yes” or “no.” Signals that say no include:

- Frowning
- Furrowing brow
- Looking away
- Rolling away
- Fingers splayed
- Batting and kicking away
- Crying in a way that expresses distress

Signals that say yes include:

- Making eye contact
- Reaching for you
- Lying still and calm
- Wiggling with excitement
- Cooing
- Smiling
Recognizing these signals and following them as a guide to what your baby is or isn’t in the mood for is an important part of building a healthy connection with your baby. Your baby will go through several stages of alertness during the day. As you notice his body language, you’ll soon learn the difference between these stages and his engagement/disengagement cues. Never insist on massage when your baby is clearly saying, “No, I’m not in the mood for this.”

Where to Massage
The location where you massage your baby is up to you. The important thing to consider is safety and comfort. Because infant massage is so versatile and adaptable, you can do it just about anywhere, including with:

- Baby in your arms or lap
- Baby in front of you on a changing table
- Baby on a soft blanket on the floor in front of you

How Long to Massage
To know how long each massage should be, look to your baby for signals that say “I like this” and signals that say “I’m not all done.” Babies need breaks just like adults do, so watch your baby, and when her cues are saying “I need a break,” break for some cuddle, quiet, or feeding time.

If you’re done before your baby, that’s okay; just say “All done!” Just as you look to your baby for cues, your baby will look to you for cues. Let your baby know when you need to finish.

What type of oil should I use & why?

Using oil on the skin helps avoid friction during massage. When Loving Touch is used with newborns, oil may not be needed. Studies conducted at the Touch Research Institute indicate that the use of oil had a better response than not using oil. Natural cold-pressed or organic oils, such as sweet almond, apricot, sesame seed or grape seed oil, will nourish your baby’s skin and give a very smooth and pleasant feeling. Do not use mineral oil-based lotions, peanut oil or baby powder. The reason for using natural and organic oil is because babies put their hands in their mouths and the use of unscented oil makes them able to recognize their mother’s scent.

Massage strokes downward and out (Indian Massage) typically for tension relief.

Movements going up the extremity and toward the heart (Swedish ) for circulation

Massaging is done WITH baby not TO our baby

Asking if we can massage them is respectful.

Warm some oil in your hands and enjoy
It is never too late to begin massage. Evidence-based practice supports the use of infant massage. Whether your baby is a newborn or several years old, massage can bring immediate and lasting results. Expectant parents often take infant massage instruction in advance so they are ready to begin this wonderful loving touch right from the start.

Benefits for parents and primary caregivers include:

- Provides all of the essential indicators of intimate parent-infant bonding and attachment: eye-to-eye, touch, voice, smell, movement, and thermal regulation.
- Encourages pre-verbal communication between caregiver and infant
- Helps parents feel more confident and competent in caring for their children
- Helps parents to ease their stress if they are a working parent and must be separated from their children for extended periods during the day
- Provides parents with one-on-one quiet time or interactive play with their children
- Creates a regular time of intimacy between parent and child.
- Increases parents' self-esteem by reinforcing and enhancing their skills as parents, and validates their role
- Gives parents the tools for understanding their child's unique rhythms and patterns
- Teaches parents how to read their infants' cues and recognize their states of awareness
- Gives parents a special way to interact with their children who may be hospitalized. Helps parents feel a greater part of the healing process
- Daily massage helps parents to unwind and relax
- Provides a positive way for fathers to interact with their infants/children

Benefits for infants, babies and children include the following:

- Provides a special time of communication that fosters love, compassion, and respect
- Improves general well-being
- Provides an intimate time for children to confide in parents
- Improves overall functioning of the gastrointestinal tract
- Promotes relaxation and helps babies self-regulate calm, which reduces crying
- Helps to normalize muscle tone
- Improves circulation
- Enhances immune system function
- Improves midline orientation
- Helps to improve sensory and body awareness
- Enhances neurological development
- Helps baby/child to sleep deeper and more soundly
- Helps to increase oxygen and nutrient flow to cells. Improves respiration
- Helps to improve pain management; can relieve discomfort from teething.
- Helps with congestion, gas, and colic
- Enhances release of hormones in the body. The growth hormone can be stimulated which helps weight gain.
- Reduces levels of cortisol, the stress hormone
- Provides all of the essential indicators of intimate parent-infant bonding and attachment: eye-to-eye, touch, voice, smell, movement, and thermal regulation.
- Stimulates all of the physiological systems. Massage sparks the neurons in their brains to grow and branch out to encompass other neurons.
Legs

Playing, kicking, diaper changes, and baths all help your baby become aware of her legs. Because of this awareness, the legs are a good place to start your massage. To avoid overstimulation, massage only one leg at a time.

**Indian Milking**

1. Hold your baby’s ankle with one hand.
2. With your other hand, fingers on top and thumb on bottom, mold your fingers to the leg.
3. Stroke from hip to ankle.
4. Switch hands and stroke the other side of the leg from hip to ankle.

**Wringing-Turn and Caress** With both hands turning opposite each other wind your way from the thigh up to the ankle and off the foot.

**Thumb over Thumb**

1. Support your baby’s ankle with both hands.
2. Place your thumbs on the sole of the foot.
3. Stroke slowly from the heel to the toes, alternating thumbs.

**Pressure Points all over the bottom of the foot**

1. Walk thumbs up to the bottom of the feet to include the surface under the toes.
2. To get the toes to open, kiss the tops of toes so can reach that area

**Toe Hugs**
1. Place your thumb and index finger around one of your baby's toes.
2. Slide your fingers to the tip of the toe.
3. Repeat for each toe.

**Ankle Circles**

![Ankle Circles Diagram]

1. Support your baby's ankle in your hands.
2. With your thumb, circle around the top of the ankle.
3. With your index finger, circle around the back.

**Rolling the Leg**

1. Playdough in your hand and you are making a rope
2. Effect is to squeeze the muscle against the bone for improved circulation

**Swedish Milking**

![Swedish Milking Diagram]

1. Hold your baby's ankle with one hand.
2. With the other hand, fingers on top and thumb on bottom, mold your fingers to the leg.
3. Stroke from ankle to hip.
4. Switch hands and stroke the other side of the leg from ankle to hip.

**More oil if needed and move on to the other leg using the same strokes.**

**Tummy**

**Hand over Hand**

![Hand over Hand Diagram]

1. Place one hand across your baby's belly so that your pinky is just under the rib cage.
2. Alternating hands, in a paddling motion, stroke from beneath the rib cage to where your hands
Sun Moon

1. Move one hand in a full circle, stroking clockwise around your baby’s belly. Avoid any direct pressure on the belly button.
2. Follow with the other hand.
3. Use the flat, padded surface of your fingers on the tummy.

I Love You

1. Imagine that your baby can see a “U” on his tummy.
2. With the flat part of your fingers, stroke on your baby’s left side from below the rib cage to the top of the left hip. The baby sees an “I.”
3. Show your baby an “L” by starting below the rib cage on the right side. Move across the tummy to the top of the left hip. Your baby sees an “L.”
4. Show your baby the “U” by starting at the right hip. Stroke up the right side, across the belly, under the rib cage and down the left side to the left hip.

Fingers walk across tummy
1. From babies right to left walk fingers horizontally across the tummy
2. One walk above the belly button, one equal and one below

Knee to Tummy Push
1. Placing hands on infants lateral thighs, including cupping the sides of knees
2. Gently push as a unit towards the tummy and hold for 3-5 seconds
3. Release and repeat

If it appears that your baby is gassy or has constipation, repeat the strokes for the tummy walk and knees to tummy several times a day. It is advisable to massage on an empty stomach.

These strokes improve digestion by moving material through all the sections of your baby’s colon.
Integration

1. Place your hands on your baby's tummy.
2. Sweep your hands slowly down the body from the tummy to the toes.

Chest

Open Book

1. Place your hands on your baby's chest under the chin.
2. Using the flat, padded part of your fingers, stroke your hands out toward the shoulders as if flattening the pages of a book, and then stroke around the ribs.
3. With lighter pressure, glide your hands back up to the starting position, making a heart shape around the rib cage.

Butterfly

1. Rest your hands at your baby's sides.
2. Take one hand and glide diagonally across your baby's chest, from the waist to the opposite shoulder.
3. Give the shoulder a hug, and then glide back to the starting position.
4. Repeat this stroke with the other hand to the opposite shoulder.
5. Continue alternating hands in this crisscross motion across your baby's chest.
Integration

1. Place your hands on your baby’s shoulders.
2. Slowly sweep your hands from the shoulders, down the chest, tummy, and legs, and down to the toes.

Arms

Pitressage small circles in the arm pit area- encourages lymphatic drainage

Indian Milking

1. Hold your baby’s wrist with one hand.
2. With the other hand on top and thumb on the bottom, mold your fingers to the arm.
3. Stroke from the shoulder to the wrist.
4. Switch hands and stroke the other side of the arm.

Wringing-Turn and Caress- With both hands turning opposite each other wind your way from the upper arm up to the wrist and off the hand.

Open the Hand and Fingers

1. Glide your thumbs one after the other into the palm of your baby’s hand to open the hand.
2. Place your thumb and index finger around one of your baby’s fingers.
3. Gently glide down and off the tip of the finger.
4. Repeat for each finger.
Rolling the Arm

1. Playdough in your hand and you are making a rope
2. Effect is to squeeze the muscle against the bone for improved circulation

Wrist Circles

1. Support your baby’s arm in both of your hands.
2. With your thumbs, circle around the top of the wrist.
3. With your index fingers, circle around the bottom of the wrist.

Swedish Milking

1. Hold your baby’s wrist with one hand.
2. With your other hand (fingers on top and thumb on bottom) mold your fingers to the arm.
3. Stroke from wrist to shoulder.
4. Switch hands and stroke the other side of the arm.

Integration

1. Place your hands on your baby’s shoulders.
2. Slowly sweep your hands from her shoulders down her arms and through her body down to her toes.
More oil if needed and move on to the other arm using the same strokes.

Face

Relax the Eyes

1. Place the pads of your thumbs on your baby's eyebrows or brow line near the nose.
2. Gently stroke out to the end of the brow.

Upper Lip Smile

1. Place your thumbs on the center of the upper lip.
2. Stroke out to the edges of the mouth.

Lower Lip Smile

1. Place your thumbs on the center of the lower lip.
2. Stroke out to the edges of the mouth.

Back

Back and Forth
1. Place both hands together at the top of your baby’s back.
2. Move your hands back and forth across the back while moving from the shoulders to the bottom.
3. Stroke back up to the shoulders.

_Swoop_

1. Place one hand still at your baby’s bottom.
2. Swoop your other hand from the shoulders down the back to where your hands meet on the bottom.

_Circles_

1. Make small circles using the flat, padded parts of your fingers.
2. Circle down one side of the back, and then back up the other side—never on the spine.
3. You can also include circles on the bottom.

_Combing the back_

1. From neck to buttocks with fingers like a rake
2. Gently vibrate and comb down the back
3. Decreasing pressure each time, but not tickling

Now that you and your baby have enjoyed the massage time together, pick him up and spend some time holding and cuddling. Enjoy the moment.
Baby massage

Getting started

Baby massage is soothing, enjoyable and a great way to connect with your baby. You can do it after a bath or when baby is dressed or just in his cot. Before you begin, **show baby your hands so he can “consent” to the massage** (he’ll turn his head or roll away if he’s not interested).

To get started, **smooth a few drops of edible oil such as olive or sweet almond oil** into your warm hands and begin massaging the soles of baby’s feet. **Use firm, gentle, slow strokes from the heel towards the toes.**

Continue with **long smooth strokes up baby’s legs.** Massage from the ankle up to the thigh and over the hip. You can try massaging both legs at once or just one at a time.

Massaging the upper body

Start the upper body massage with your hands on baby’s shoulders and make gentle strokes in towards the chest.

Massage the arms by stroking from the shoulders down towards the wrists. **Try not to get oil on baby’s hands but if that happens, wipe his fingers clean before he sucks them.**

If your baby’s tummy feels soft (not hard or full) massage his belly using circular, clockwise strokes. Babies’ tummies are sensitive, so if he becomes unsettled, move on to the next step.
Massaging the face and back

Use your fingertips to massage baby's face. Stroke from the middle of his forehead, down the outside of his face and in towards his cheeks.

If baby is still relaxed once you've finished massaging the front of his body, you can turn him onto his tummy and use long, smooth strokes from head to toe.

Use respectful touch and stop the massage if baby is not enjoying himself or showing any signs of being uncomfortable. It's also best to avoid a massage if you are very tense, or if baby is agitated or upset.

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References